# The Library Assistant:

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## THE ANNUAL MEETING AT CROYDON.

In the art of combining business with pleasure the L.A.A. seems to make constant progress. Occasionally the monthly meetings, and generally the annual meetings, are used as excuses—or should we say justifications?—for a day's outing, And certainly this is a custom which it would be well to encourage until it passes into an ancient and venerable tradition which *not* to observe would be vile and horrible sacrilege.

No doubt many members smiled grimly when they received with the June number of the *Assistant* a special programme setting forth what resembled in bulk a day's work rather than a day's pleasure, yet the ambitious framers of this programme have had the satisfaction of seeing it carried out, and proclaimed by all who helped to carry it out to be an unequivocal success. The fates even conspired in our favour, and fine sunshiny weather, not too warm, prevailed all day.

Between ten and half-past the advance guard assembled at the Central Library, situated in the Town Hall, Croydon. Those who arrived early had an opportunity, which others took later in the day, of inspecting an exhibition of forms, materials, and appliances used in the administration of the Croydon Libraries, and illustrating the whole of the internal and external economy of those libraries. Several members of the staff were present and gave lucid and comprehensive explanations of some of the more esoteric aspects of librarianship as practiced at Croydon. The exhibition represented really an enormous amount of work and was a triumph of methodical arrangement. We only regret that as there are only twenty-four hours in the day enough time could not be given to do it justice. We feel that we cannot adequately thank the Croydon staff for the energy which must have been expended on the exhibition; they must realize that a good work well done is its own reward, and that our appreciation of it was sincere and, let us hope, intelligent. At half-past ten about two dozen members and friends (not so many as might have been expected, but each must have said to himself "We few, we happy few,") set out on the first of the rambles—a walk to Beddington and Carshalton by the River Wandle. This part of Surrey is a typical example of the county in its quieter and more tranquil aspect. The river, which in parts is as busy as the Thames at London, runs here through

gently undulating park and meadow-land, in which the full heat of the sun is tempered by some fine old timber. On this walk we had the good fortune to have as guides Mr. W. Whitaker, B.A., F.R.S., F.G.S., the Vice-Chairman of the Croydon Libraries Committee, and Mr. Councillor J. O. Pelton, a member of the Libraries Committee, whose information on the chief places of interest in the district and of its geological and antiquarian features added both to the interest and instruction of the walk. Unfortunately neither of these gentlemen was able to accompany us on the afternoon excursion. The ride back from Sutton on the top of a tram allowed us to enjoy the fine breeze, induced healthy thoughts of material needs to be satisfied, and stopped effectually all babbling o' green fields and such-like sentimentality. On returning to Croydon it was found that reinforcements had been arriving in bulk and soon the select little band of two dozen had reached about a hundred. But the more the merrier. Mr. Jast entertained a number of friends and members of the Council of the L.A.A. to lunch. It need only be said that the lunch was worthy of Mr. Jast, and those who know that gentleman best will best realize what this means. Throughout the day it was noticed that one pleasant event followed another with bewildering swiftness; never for one moment did we rest in the industrious search for pleasure. For the afternoon another magnificent walk had been arranged, this time under the guidance of Mr. Rutherford Purnell. "As an alternative," said the programme, "*for those who do not care for walking* a visit to the Whitgift Hospital . . . . thence to the old Palace of the Archbishops of Canterbury." But where are they—those who do not care for walking when the sun is shining, the air delightfully warm, and all nature wearing its finest holiday garb? The magnificent wooded slopes of the Surrey Hills beckoned to us and we were too wise to resist. The result was that the whole of the L.A.A. present with its sisters, cousins and aunts (quite a number of ladies had arrived by this time), and a few librarians, spent one of the most perfect summer afternoons which we have had this year in discovering Croham Hurst and the Addington hills and woods. It seemed somewhat of a pity to abandon entirely the Whitgift Hospital and old Archbishops' Palace from the programme, but there must always be large remnants from too prodigal a feast. The afternoon ramble formed a complete contrast to that of the morning; the two together making a very fair epitome of typical Surrey scenery. But even the most perfect days have their drawbacks, and continually frowning over the morning and afternoon's enjoyment was the dire threat of a Business Meet-

ing in the evening. Duty must be done; so slowly, and wearing the mask of stern resolve on sunburnt faces, we very reluctantly left the beautiful country—and in this mood were photographed. In the garden behind the Town Hall Mr. J. H. Baldock, F.R.P.S., had his camera in readiness and took great pains to get a satisfactory picture. Now that the ordeal of the camera was over, there was left but one more task to fulfil before settling down to what was after all the chief object of the gathering at Croydon—the annual business meeting. By kind invitation of Mr. Alderman H. Keatley Moore, B.A., B.Mus., J.P., to whom we have been indebted on a former occasion for similar hospitality, we proceeded to an excellent tea served in the handsome and spacious committee rooms, which were also placed at our disposal. The Mayor, Major J. E. Fox, J.P., arrived whilst we were at tea, and in a short but most courteous and complaisant speech he welcomed us to Croydon; a little late in the day, perhaps, for some of us had been there since the early morning, but nevertheless full of kindly welcome. The opinion he expressed that the L.A.A. would be welcome to come again to Croydon was certainly endorsed in the heartiest manner possible by everyone present. Mr. W. B. Thorne replied thanking the Mayor and Croydon authorities for the consideration and elaborate attention which they had literally showered upon us. After tea we proceeded to the Council Chamber where, under the most able chairmanship of Mr. Alderman Keatley Moore, the first part of the annual meeting was held. An account of this meeting will be found elsewhere. On reviewing this day s pleasure from beginning to end one is almost amazed to think of the number of people who helped to make it a complete success. A number of eminent Croydon citizens have been already referred to in this all too brief account of our outing, to all of whom we are greatly indebted. But above all must we thank the Chairman of the Croydon Libraries Committee, Mr. Alderman H. Keatley Moore, J.P., the Chief Librarian, Mr. L. Stanley Jast, and the other members of the staff of the Croydon Public Libraries. Every member of the staff worked indefatigably in order that their visitors might lack nothing. If the writer of this account may be permitted to make one personal remark before laying down his pen from a task which has been a labour of love and nothing else, he would only say that before getting into the train in the evening he picked up a little white stone from the roadway and taking it home with him deposited it in a small box which he keeps for that purpose. Each white stone marks a happy day and there is none which is more worthy of its position than that deposited on June 16th, 1909.

### THE PHOTOGRAPH.

Copies of the photograph taken at the Annual Meeting, which is a very good one, may be obtained, mounted or unmounted, in silver or red carbon, as required, post free, on sending a postal order or cheque for eighteenpence to Mr. J. H. Baldock, F.R.P.S., "Overdale," St. Leonard's Road, Croydon. It is possible that many of our readers may care to possess a copy of this excellent souvenir of one of the most successful of our recent meetings.

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## THE FUNCTION OF A CENTRAL LIBRARY AND THE PROBLEM OF BRANCHES.*

By ARTHUR J. HAWKES, *Leeds Public Libraries, lately of Bournemouth Public Libraries.*

The public library aims, or should aim, at encompassing three objects: its first and most elementary purpose is to be a toolhouse to every intelligent and self-respecting citizen, no matter how mean his scholarly attainments or how lowly his station. By this, I mean that the bricklayer's labourer equally with the architect's draughtsman should be able to find on its shelves such instructions as may advance each in his own sphere, and enable each to make his spare time both profitable and enjoyable. This is the "practical" aspect of library activity; and far from being despised, should be its most encouraged and exhaustive department. Rather higher in the scale of duties comes the public library, as an educational institution—using the word "higher" in an ethical sense only, not as being proportionally more important, but merely as superior in degree of culture. Herein, too, the bricklayer's labourer must be given as much consideration as the science master. The amateur electrician should be stimulated to pass from the practice of bell-fitting to the more intellectual and wider field of pure physics. The needs of the gardener-electrician in this respect differ only in degree from those of the civil engineer who indulges a taste for mathematics, and he has an equal right to demand satisfaction.

The last and highest office of the public library is the promotion of culture. The ambition animating public library founders, and all those engaged in their maintenance, should be to so raise the public taste that the philosophy of Plato may find more admirers than the local football hero, and Shakespeare and Turner be better appreciated than the comic of the music-hall. The greatest achievement of the public library is to change the philistine plumber into the discerning connoisseur.

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*Read before the Library Assistants' Association at the Lewisham Central Library, on 19th May, 1909.

A public library can only fulfil its purpose as a tool-house with reasonable efficiency and success by the establishment and judicious distribution of branches; in the larger towns their need is, I suppose, manifest to everyone. That many towns do not require them, goes without saying. Old and compact cities like Winchester, or Rochester, or York, are amply served by a central foundation only. With modern towns, except in a few cases, quite different conditions prevail. They are not built within prescribed areas; walls and ramparts which strategical needs imposed upon the ancient planners no longer hinder development; often multiple in origin they become, when fully grown, more like distinct though contiguous towns than a single and organically united city. If the library authorities aim at being of the utmost utility to all sections of the community generally, and all citizens individually, the provision of branch libraries in such a town is an absolute necessity.

A good illustration of this type is to be found in my own town of Bournemouth. A glance at the map will show how essential is the establishment of branches if general usefulness is to be achieved. Bournemouth is six and a half miles long; and the "heart" of the borough is not by any means identical with, or even near to its geographical or population centre, in fact it is a very lop-sided town indeed. According to the scale put forward some time ago by a well-known librarian, the establishment of a branch could only be justified when it served a population of some thirty thousand, a figure much below the average for Bristol, Manchester, Birmingham, Glasgow, and other great cities. Bournemouth has a total population of under 75,000; and is provided with four branches. The justification of such an extensive system lies in the immense size of the borough, and Bournemouth is not the only town which has to cope with this circumstance. It is rather too much to expect a carpenter after a day's hard work to tramp something like four and a half miles and back for a book; yet that is what the provision of only a central library means, and the addition of one branch according to the approved ratio would not lessen it materially. This man has to pay the library rate equally with his more fortunate townsman, but before he can reap its benefit he must spend the same amount over again in tram fares, or some other form of transit. To plant libraries in such profusion, however, brings the organizers into acute conflict with the limited penny rate. With establishment charges spread over four buildings instead of being centred upon one, a great deal of extra expense is incurred. Even with very moderate establishments the four as compared with one large building would probably absorb at least double

the money in foundation and maintenance expenses, and the books and salaries funds shrink proportionally. But having shown the necessity of the provision it remains to be pointed out how the necessarily heavy expenditure entailed may be met without seriously curtailing the usefulness of the institution. This is only to be done by treating the institutions as a reciprocally dependent system—each a complement of the other, and completing and extending the usefulness of the whole. Of paramount importance in such a system is the central institution: the efficiency of the central as a complete and exhaustive library should remain unimpaired; the whole loss of expansion due to constrained finances should be borne by the branches themselves. In this respect, whilst being necessities when viewed through the spectacles of ultimate aims, branches must be *treated* as luxuries when seen through the eye of administration. The difficulty, however, is not got over merely by making a rule. The consequent neglect of a branch library is not always quietly accepted by the inhabitants of the district concerned. These people insist upon considering the central as if it were only intended to serve its immediate neighbourhood, much as a branch might be, instead of the whole town; their district, they think, ought to be equally well looked after. Consequently a service is sometimes demanded quite out of proportion to the locality's rate burden. At one time, for instance, a branch library with which I am acquainted actually cost more to keep up, owing to the insistent demands of the neighbourhood, than the district it serves subscribed to the rate. Such wild jealousies must be resisted.

The problem, then, is how to meet the reasonable demands of a district, and at the same time hold it within rigid financial limits. In order to show how this may be done, it will be necessary to consider the general question of the distribution of branches. Attention has already been directed to previous attempts at laying down principles which should govern in this matter, but their inadequacy has been disclosed; and whilst it may seem presumptuous upon my part, I propose to indicate afresh what I conceive to be the guiding line.

In the first place the district in which it is proposed to establish a branch should be occupied as nearly as possible by one class of people—a social stratum or an industrial denomination—and the library, of course, should be erected near about the centre of the area. This may be thought an impossible condition. Where is there a district which presents such uniformity of feature? In this connection, let two things be remembered: first that the policy advocated by this paper is "small branches and many of 'em," and secondly, that municipal government,

any more than other governments is not based upon the rights of exceptional individuals, but has for its aim the general utility. It is the associaton of allied interests which makes mutual effort practicable. A recognition of this condition permits of specialization in literature in a marked degree, and this promotes economy. Conversely, when any reasonable area exists occupied more or less by a distinct social class, that, to my mind, is ample justification for the establishment of a library. This should be adequate to the needs of this district: neither extravagant nor parsimonious. If its size does not seem to justify the erection of a special building, then go without one, and create a depôt; but do something to meet the special needs of a special locality. I might say here that under no circumstances would I issue fiction from such a depôt—that is merely to encourage laziness. Where social distinction does not exist, other points might be considered. The area might be expected to present certain general features which single it out as a "district," as a geographical unit. Even here the matter is not so simple as may appear. Before the scheme for the provision of a library materializes, such a locality must be studied in an intelligent fashion in order that the direction of its probable future extension may be understood and taken into account. For instance, let us suppose that it is proposed to provide a library for a kind of semi-detached outlying part of a borough possessing well-defined limits. On the east side of this district the land may be low-lying and damp, and present other hindrances to development; whereas on the west the existence of a healthy plateau would be a positive invitation to the speculating builder. In the circumstances, the direction of growth is very evident; and to erect commodious premises heedless of such conditions, only to find in, say, ten years time that the extension of the district has left the library high and dry on the margin of a well-defined, and perhaps fairly circular area, would be foolish in the extreme.

When neither of the foregoing features are presented, the borough must be chopped up in a way that considerations of population and distance dictate. Here to some extent we fall back upon the recommendations noticed earlier, though I would reduce the minimum figures considerably. In cases of such arbitrary division of urban areas, the following suggested rule is elastic enough to suit varying circumstances. A population of some 20,000 persons should be regarded as the lowest warranting the establishment of a branch; and this population should be gathered within an area whose radius is rather less than half the distance which separates the proposed branch library from the central. That is to say, given your branch as

situate a mile and three quarters from the central, there should be 20,000 people resident within a three-quarter mile radius, or 10,000 per square mile, not exceptionally dense for the class of town we are considering. My last point under this head is relative to the cost of a branch, and the proportion it should enjoy of the total rate. This should in no circumstances exceed three-fifths of the sum collected from the area concerned, leaving two fifths as the district's share in the up-keep and development of the central.

(*To be continued*).

## THE PLACE AND TREATMENT OF FICTION IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES.*

By Daniel W. Herdman, Deputy-Librarian, Sunderland.

The epic poem, the drama, and the novel are the three kinds of literature included in the wide denotation "works of imagination" all of which appeal to similar feelings and excite similar interest. In each, men are represented in co-operation or collision. In view of these common features, it is somewhat remarkable that a controversy should arise around prose fiction, without any reference to either of the other forms. Perhaps we may explain this as arising through the realism and naturalism of the novel seeming for the present to have superseded the idealism and tragedy of the epic and the drama. There is the fact, too, that rarely does a nation have the honour to boast of half-a-dozen poets and dramatists of any great note, whereas the novelist abounds, and consequently creates and supplies a much wider demand. It is with more than diffidence that we approach a subject around which so much debate has centred. Periodicals, professional and otherwise, have devoted no small amount of space to the consideration of the matter, and librarians, as a rule, are utterly tired of it. It requires some courage, therefore, to bring before this gathering a few remarks upon a subject which is so often misrepresented in the public press, and which has come to deserve the significant appellation—the "great fiction bore!"

That the library of the subscription type, which is maintained entirely by its supporters; and that of the circulating order, should provide an ample supply of the latest novels for their intellectual dram-drinking public is outside the sphere of this paper. The former exists in the interests of a self-limited section of readers; the latter to satisfy the business instincts of a tradesman. The public, or rate supported library—the

*Read before the Fourteenth Annual Meeting of the Library Assistants' Association at the Town Hall, Croydon, on 16th June, 1909.

institution of the democracy and the people's university—happily has other and wider fields of operation. Here, the lover of history and of nature, the man of letters, and the student of social movements, and of the arts and sciences, find intellectual food and stimulus. The diffusion of knowledge, then, is the primary service that the public library renders to humanity. But would such an object entirely exclude fiction from rate-supported libraries? If transient, and sometimes prurient, productions (generally the writings of women) are included in the question, we would bar the whole class. But do public libraries provide such trash? That is a question which we do not hesitate to answer emphatically in the negative; as such institutions exercise infinite care to exclude from their shelves publications of an unwholesome character. Until the dawn of a new republic wherein novelists and their readers have ceased to exist—a somewhat Utopian idea—standard fiction will rightly retain its influence in society, and as an interpreter of life, will continue to deserve a place in every public library, at least in the home reading department. We, however, have given to education, in the widest sense, the first place on the list, because we wish to emphasize this as the most important function of the public library. The public point of view, as of nearly every other subject of any importance, is divided, and it is interesting at least to consider a few phases of public opinion. In favour of the municipal libraries including fiction, it is universally claimed that the novelist is a great expander of sympathies; he at least carries our thought into many a far country of human experience, which it could not otherwise have reached; he combines events and persons with a reference to ends; he concentrates into a dialogue of a few sentences an amount of feeling and character which it would take real men some hours to express; he imparts a rapidity to the stream of incident quite unlike the sluggishness of our daily experience. In these strenuous days we hear much of the sacrifice of the individual to the common weal upon the altar of professional limitations; and it is true that while specialists become more useful as citizens, they seem to lose their completeness as men. The requirements of special study become more exacting and there is less of human interest to touch men within their calling, and they have less leisure to seek it beyond. Hence it follows that one who has made the most of his profession is apt to feel that he has not attained his full stature as a man, and as such has interests far too limited. To such an one, be he cloistered student or factory toiler, the novel (and perhaps the newspaper) break his sympathies from the bondage of his personal situation

and reach to the utmost confines of human life. He need no longer envy the man of action and adventure, or sigh for new regions of enterprise. In good prose fiction the world is all before him. He may explore its recesses in silence, in peace, and in restful recreation, and as Sir William Bailey has it, "he can choose his location and his plot, he can sit in a room or garden, or in bed, and can witness the play and be an audience of one." If the proper study of mankind is man, then the great novelists are equally great teachers; they must be keen students in the school of life to present in prose that which is probable or true to life; and he who makes man better known to man does much towards healing the wounds which man inflicts on his fellow. In this way is promoted a common understanding between the higher and lower classes of society. If the novel cannot initiate the effort to transcend the limitations which make man a creature of circumstances it at least brings man nearer to his neighbour, and enables each class to see itself as others see it. And from the fusion of opinions and sympathies thus produced nothing but good can come. The novelist supplies a kind of literary food easy of assimilation by the weakest natures, and such readers lose much of their weakness and acquire a cultivation which they previously lacked. If novels cannot teach men how to live, they may, through the wide range of their subjects, enable those who have already found a principle of life to give it a freer application than their limited circumstances would otherwise allow; the fictitious experience may give expansion to the personal, while the personal gives reality to the fictitious. As fiction appeals to such various classes and capabilities exhibiting the identity of human nature under such various circumstances, it provides a channel through which the current of public opinion may work, fusing differences and breaking down prejudices.

On the other hand we may occasionally meet the critic of the philosophical sort whose complaint against fiction is best illustrated by a comparison of it with poetry and the drama. We are told that the poetic genius penetrates the monotonous disorder of everyday life, and lays bare the impassioned expression, whilst the dramatist shows us some elemental force of humanity, minus the accidents of time and place, working itself out in free conflict with other forces. The novelist attempts to do with weaker means, and for weaker intellects, what the poet and the dramatist aim at securing for the mind of the higher order. He idealises enough to make us feel pleasure or pain, not enough to make us forget ourselves, indeed the reverse, for novel reading tends to development of self-consciousness. He excites curiosity or suspense, not awe or

hope; and if his story ends well, he flatters our feelings of complacency with the thought that the world is not such a bad place after all; if it ends badly, he fortifies the morbid conviction that misery and lawlessness rule the world.

Again, it is held that the public library has no duty to perform in supplying the "smooth tale, generally of love" for the mental pabulum of the lethargic individual who wishes in ease to enjoy himself twice over—in act and in fancy; or, if the former were denied him, at all events to traverse in fancy the scenes of excitement and pleasure of which his circumstances prevented his enjoyment in actuality. Out of heart with the world about him—conscious of its apparent meanness, and without that mental vigour to re-cast it in the mould of his own thought—he imagines that after a sojourn in the realm of fiction he may come back braced for his battle in life. On these lines it is contended that as the novel does not subordinate incidents to ideas, it fails to make us *think* to that degree when the world becomes ours by the power of ideas. It is far easier to laugh or to weep than to *think;* to turn either a ludicrous or sentimental light upon a great principle of morals or religion than to enter into the real meaning of such matters.

Coming now to the bookseller's position, we have generally found the retail dealers in new books in one mind on this question. They interpret the Libraries Acts after the narrower idea; and would be much better pleased if public libraries were kept to the original plan for which they were founded, i. e., as purely educational mediums—to provide books of general reference, costly scientific and similiar works such as few can afford to purchase. Fiction—that is to say up-to-date fiction—would be entirely left out for the distribution of booksellers, as they claim that the municipality has no more duty to perform in providing novels than music-halls. Nevertheless, the far-sighted dealer will still admit that it is perfectly true that a person had better read novels than many of the "yellow" papers of the day, or to read nothing at all. On the other hand, of course, we have met the more optimistic bookseller who combines a lending library with his business. He confidently welcomes, and evidently with sound reason, the provision of fiction in the public libraries; for he affirms that public libraries create and foster a demand for such reading which they are quite unable owing to their limitations to meet. Hence the habitual novel-reader eventually becomes his regular customer. At this turn of events we can well afford to exclaim: "For this relief, many thanks!" for there is perhaps no class of reader so difficult to please as the omnivorous consumer of last month's output of fiction. Regarding

the provisions of the Public Libraries Acts, it is argued by some librarians and others that it was never the intention of the framers of these laws that fiction as fiction should be circulated. This may or may not be so; but the fact remains that since the general expression "books" is used to indicate, amongst other things, what a library authority may provide, such a contention places one in a position without legal support.

As to Committee policy, the line of least resistance would lead to the provision of fiction in wholesale quantities. Indeed, practically the whole of the money available for the purchase of books might be expended on light literature, and it would, we think, be exceedingly probable that the public cry would be "More." In no place that we have heard of has the supply of this form of recreative literature been equal to the demand. Whether the proportion of fiction to the total stock is 50 per cent., as in one public library that we know, or as low as 16 per cent., as in another, the experience has been the same. Hence it is clear, we cannot hope to meet the fiction demand. The line must be drawn somewhere, and it is possible to draw it a little nearer the educational field of our work. Inadequate we are, and must remain on the recreative side; but there is no reason why we should lack on the educational side. Literature has no concern with flimsy novels, which fulfil the utmost end of their being when they find a purchaser. A literary gentleman of recognised standing suggested to this Association a few years ago the incalculable boon an occasional bonfire of books would be, though he admitted it would be difficult to find the inquisitor and executioner who would satisfy all consciences. Notwithstanding this, however, we would advocate a careful reduction of the proportion of fiction at present stocked in some established libraries, by a process of judicious "weeding-out;" and when organizing new libraries to curtail the representation to, say, 15 or 20 per cent. It would be a very small library indeed where this proportion would not include sets of the standard writers. We believe that a library committee can attract just the readers it sets itself to cater for, though we emphatically refuse to believe that any committee deliberately panders to low tastes. We have known of only one committee that had cause to eliminate a considerable number of novels of a pernicious character, and the fault lay in the haphazard manner of selecting from the literary showman in the bookshop, without adequate knowledge of the authors or current reviews, on the part of the person making the selection. In the classical novel, of which Richardson and Fielding were the founders, we possess valuable criticisms of life, and an index

of the spirit of the times in which the authors lived—a reflection of the thought and sentiment of their day. Historical novels stimulate a love for the past, which is the forerunner of a desire for a knowledge of the past, they create an interest in the picturesque elements of bygone institutions and customs. We have known of many instances where the reading of a good historical romance has led to the perusal of actual history. Sir Walter Scott was perhaps the first of historical novelists to bring to its composition an adequate knowledge, which resulted in a combination of instruction with amusement. The permanent value of Scott's novels lies in his pictures of the Scottish peasantry. He found humanising agencies at work around the poorest cotter's hearth, and taught the worldly wealthy of his day what had long seemed forgotten, that the human soul may become independent of the accessories of fortune—truly a lesson often missed by many sermons of our day.

The method of making fiction accessible in our libraries is too well known to need much description. Generally an author-list and another for the titles suffice; but the increasing practice of supplementing the usually meaningless brief entry from the title-page with an annotation in the catalogue is one which cannot be too strongly advocated. Such annotation need not be critical, lest the librarian, who is only human, should allow his individual taste too free scope; but a brief outline of the aim or purpose of the work, or of the period treated, is invaluable. To take a recent novel—Whiting's *The Plough of Shame*—it is quite apparent that such a title conveys no idea of the book's import; but an added note indicating that the subject was Italian history of the early sixteenth century facilitates the reader's task of selection at once.

When a novel bears upon any particular phase of life, or period of history, or description of a locality, it would prove of much interest to insert a note directing the reader who wishes to pursue the subject further, to non-fictional books treating upon that subject.

The shelf arrangement of prose fiction in English alphabetically by the name of the author is a method adopted so generally that only antiquated institutions locate by the old system of accession number. The advantage of finding the writings of a given author is obvious. For call or charging number the use of the initial letter of the author's surname, followed by numerals given decimally works well, being simple and expansive. Fiction illustrating a subject might with much utility be given a cross-reference entry in the subject-catalogue as may be seen in the libraries in which we have the privilege of meeting to-night.

## PROCEEDINGS.

### ANNUAL MEETING: EVENING SESSION.

The Evening Session was held in the Croydon Council Chamber, on Wednesday, 16th June, at 7.0 p.m. Mr. Alderman H. Keatley Moore occupied the Chair. In cordially welcoming the Association to Croydon, Mr. Moore said that he regarded the library profession as the silent part of the schoolmaster's profession. The schoolmaster proper and the librarian each in turn taught people that the best lesson they could learn was to help themselves. In libraries good books should be placed in the most seductive positions; but he also thought it part of the librarian's duty to give readings from the best books, to give lectures and in other ways to teach readers how to choose books. In doing their duty they might be proud to number themselves among the makers of the England of the future. Mr. Harry Farr (Chief Librarian, Cardiff) then read a paper on "Libraries in Rural Districts," which was followed by a paper on "The Place and Treatment of Fiction in Public Libraries," by Mr. Daniel W. Herdman (Sunderland), read in the writer's unavoidable absence by Mr. J. D. Young. Mr. Herdman's paper appears on page 375, that by Mr. Farr we hope to publish later. A brief discussion ensued. Mr. J. Keane (Croydon) pointed out that the works of George Meredith, for example, required in reading as severe concentration and were as complete a revelation of character as many so-called more serious works. He urged members to remember that in the final resort the contents of a public library must be determined by the public, who were its masters. Mr. Snowsill (Camberwell) thought historical fiction inaccurate as a rule, and held that the higher type was that which depicted the unfolding of character. He thought there should be a certain co-operation among librarians and libraries, in order to determine what limit should be set to the provision of fiction.

Mr. W. H. Shawcross (Woolwich) said experience demonstrated that the public wanted fiction, and it was to the interest of public libraries to supply good fiction and so retain a large section of readers, rather than, by refusing it, to send them elsewhere possibly to read books far worse than those provided by any public library. Fiction might, and should, lead to more serious reading; it should be the servant of the public library, not its master. Mr. W. G. Chambers (Woolwich) supposed that more nonsense was written about fiction in libraries than upon any other library topic. The methods of selecting fiction were receiving more and

more attention, and bad novels rarely, if ever, found a place upon the shelves. Mr. Keane's argument that the public should have just what it fancied was fallacious. Every municipality employed experts to do special work for it—the public did not dictate to the gardener what flowers he was to grow in a given bed; they left his superior knowledge to determine what flowers were most suitable; similarly the librarian was the expert employed to choose the books for the community. The modern method of teaching was through the tale, and this formed a sufficient justification for the inclusion of fiction in public libraries. MR. ALDERMAN MOORE delighted the audience by remarking that he learned with considerable surprise that teaching, which he hitherto thought to be best done through the head, was best done through the tale. MR. J. D. STEWART (Islington) proposed a vote of thanks to the readers of the papers, and referred to the work done for rural districts in America by the Wisconsin Library Commission. MR. G. E. ROEBUCK (Walthamstow) seconded, and the vote was carried unanimously. Mr. Farr replied briefly. THE PRESIDENT (Mr. Benson Thorne) proposed a vote of thanks to Mr. Alderman Moore for his hospitality and for presiding over the meeting. Their whole reception at Croydon was thorough in heartiness and cordiality, and they owed no small part of their enjoyment to Mr. Moore. MR. H. T. COUTTS (Islington) seconded, and referred to the interest which Mr. Moore exhibited in all things germane to libraries, and to the kindnesses which he, as a former member of the Croydon staff, had experienced at his hands. Mr. Alderman Moore having replied, the proceedings terminated. The Business Meeting followed.

## ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING.

The Fourteenth Annual Business Meeting was one of the most brief of recent years. The President (Mr. Benson Thorne) took the chair at 8.10 p.m., and an hour later the whole proceedings concluded. The Minutes having been read and confirmed, THE PRESIDENT moved the adoption of the Fourteenth Annual Report. He briefly summarised the work of the year as being satisfactory and progressive. The year had been saddened by the loss of two Honorary Fellows in Thomas Greenwood and Bertram L. Dyer. The proposals of the Association in regard to the Registration Scheme of the Library Association had been heard and considered, and in various ways much quiet useful work had been done. MR. J. F.

HOGG (Battersea), seconded. As Chairman of the Finance Committee he regretted that for the first time in the history of the Association the Balance Sheet showed a deficit, in spite of economy. He hoped the membership and subscriptions would increase in the coming year. The Report was then adopted. MR. W. H. SHAWCROSS (Woolwich), proposed a vote of thanks to the retiring Officers and Council, which MR. J. WARNER (Croydon) seconded; the vote was carried with enthusiasm. THE PRESIDENT acknowledged the vote. He was relinquishing the chief position in the Association after holding it for three years, and he was glad to know that the members appreciated the services which he and his brother officers and the Council had been able to render to the Association. Sometimes the work was difficult, and often misunderstood, but he believed that library assistants in general recognised that all that had been done was prompted by the best intentions and with a single eye to the advance of their interests. He then announced the result of the ballot for Officers and Council. The Officers were unanimously elected.

## OFFICERS.

*President:* MR. W. C. BERWICK SAYERS.
*Honorary Treasurer:* MR. W. GEO. CHAMBERS.
*Honorary Secretary:* MR. HENRY T. COUTTS.

## COUNCIL.

### FELLOWS.

*Elected.*

Geo. E. Roebuck, Walthamstow ..... 164
Hugh Smith, Bishopsgate Institute ..... 143

*Not Elected.*

W. L. Coltman, Southall-Norwood ..... 24

### LONDON REPRESENTATIVES.

*Elected.*

Hopwood, H.V., Patent Office 164
Thorne, W. B., Poplar ..... 159
Stephen, G. A., St. Pancras 157
Stewart, J. D., Islington ... 157
Young, J. D., Greenwich ... 141
Hogg, J. F., Battersea ..... 116
Clarke, Miss O. E., Islington 110
Bullen, R. F., Poplar ..... 107
Hawkins, W. G., Fulham ... 94
Peters, H. R. W., Lewisham 86

*Not Elected.*

Cooper, R., Battersea ..... 81

### NON-LONDON REPRESENTATIVES.

*Elected.*

Strother, G. W., Leeds ..... 116
Purnell, H. R., Croydon ..... 112
Sureties, H. G., Hornsey ... 94
Law, W., Brighton ..... 86
Faraday, J., Hornsey ..... 85
Ross, J., Sunderland ..... 83
Walton, J., Newcastle ..... 83
Coulson, T. M., Belfast ..... 77
Owen, W. E., Coventry ..... 72
Harrison, Miss M., Leeds ... 69

*Not Elected.*

Poulter, H.W., Walthamstow 67
Young, D. S., East Ham ... 66
Sleight, J. G., Hull ..... 60
Wright, R., Croydon ..... 56
Gourley, R. J., Belfast ..... 53
Perry, J. D., Leyton ..... 53
Hayward, G. V. R., Watford 43

Mr. D. W. Herdman received a very high place among the Non-London Representatives but withdrew. The retiring President then welcomed the new President to office. The Association was fortunate in securing Mr. Sayers for that office; as one of the three diplomés of the Library Association, as an idealist of the best type, as a man of boundless energy, he would worthily preside over them in the coming year. He also welcomed Mr. H. T. Coutts to the office of Honorary Secretary. He then vacated the chair in favour of MR. W. C. BERWICK SAYERS, who thanked the members for the honour they had done him in electing him to a position he considered the highest to which any librarian could aspire while he remained an assistant, and one which had never been filled more worthily than by the man whom it was at once his privilege and misfortune to succeed. He then delivered a brief Inaugural Address, which we may be able to publish in our next issue.

A vote of thanks to the President, on the motion of MR. MOORE, brought a very successful day to an end.

[The Editor is indebted to Mr. J. D. Young for the account of the doings of the day prior to the Evening Session].

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.

At the first Council Meeting of the Fifteenth Session, held on Wednesday, 23rd June, special resolutions of thanks were carried to Mr. Alderman H. Keatley Moore, B.A., B.Mus., J.P.; to Mr. H. R. Purnell and the Croydon Libraries Staff Guild for the programme and unique exhibition of library methods; and to the Scrutineers: Miss R. L. Duménil (Hackney), Messrs. Bridge (Battersea), Mash (Croydon), Morley (Patent Office), Seward (Bromley), and Terry (Greenwich).

## IRISH BRANCH.

The May Monthly Meeting of the above was held in the Central Reference Library at Belfast. MR. R. J. GOURLEY was in the chair. It was decided that this May Meeting should terminate the session. MR. THOMAS COULSON then read a paper on the "Ethics of Fiction," showing chiefly how important a part could be played by public libraries in stamping out the desire for immoral works. The chief librarian should always be capable to act as censor regarding this matter, and keep out of his library at least all questionable novels, of which recently there had sprung up a great number. People's minds, particularly those of the young, were largely regulated by what they read, and therefore librarians and libraries had a great responsibility on their heads. There was a short discussion, Messrs. W. Moore, Goldsborough, Rowan, and Gourlay taking part.

Following the paper was the election of officers for the

coming year. The following were elected: *President:* G. H. ELLIOTT; *Chairman:* R. J. GOURLEY; *Hon. Treasurer:* WM. ROWAN; *Hon. Secretary:* WM. MOORE; *Committee:* Miss J. F. Miller, A. H. E. Moore, J. F. Scilly. Mr. Thomas Coulson, Falls Road Branch, was also nominated for the Council.

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## SOUTH WALES BRANCH ANNUAL MEETING.

The first Annual Meeting of the Branch was held at the Central Library, Cardiff, on Wednesday, April 21st, at 3.30 p.m. The chair was taken by Mr. R. G. Williams. There was a fair attendance of members. In his opening remarks the Chairman gave a short resumé of the work of the Branch during the year. He went on to say that the Branch had been highly honoured by two recent appointments—that of the Honorary President as the first Librarian of the National Library of Wales, and of the Chairman as Librarian of Cardiff. A financial statement was placed before the meeting, and this showed a slight balance on the right side. The Honorary Secretary then read the report of the Committee for the year. A discussion took place, before the election of officers, with regard to the present position and the future of the Branch. A number of members took part and a variety of opinions were expressed.

The election of officers then took place and the following were elected:—

*Chairman*: R. G. WILLIAMS; *Hon. Treasurer*: E. G. REES; *Hon. Secretary:* WYNDHAM MORGAN; *Committee:* Fred C. Bullock, Miss K. E. Jones, Charles Sexton.

The meeting closed with the passing of a vote of thanks to the Librarian of Cardiff, and to the Libraries' Committee for the use of the Librarians room for the purpose of holding the meetings of the Branch.

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## LIBRARY ASSISTANTS AS WRITERS.*

A few reflections are occasioned by the book before us. On the physical side it is a credit to the publishers, to whom indeed we owe a debt of gratitude for the best text-books of the profession; its typography is pleasant, its type-page is ample and attractive, and the paper on which it is printed is above the average. On the literary side we must discriminate. There is no visible arrangement in the order of the articles, the index is meagre, and the whole presents a heterogenous gathering of young growths in which too much care has not been taken to separate the wheat from the tares. The question arises: are not library assistants writing too much, and is not

* "Library Economics" [articles, principally by library assistants, reprinted from *The Library World*]. 9¾in., 140 pp., paper covers. Libraco. Two shillings net.

that writing accompanied by a dearth of original ideas? He would be a bold man who, having examined this volume, would answer in the negative. We have said that the volume is unequal; some of the articles are distinctly valuable, and we say at once that it is worth double its cost; and nearly all show an earnestness which is a good sign of the times; in fact, at no time earlier than this in the history of the profession in England have we had a set of assistants capable of writing such a work; but that does not altogether justify its appearance. To be frank, it is crude, unoriginal and half-educated, and it could be reduced by one half without in any way impairing its value. We really admire the courage of the writer who at this late date presents an article on the arrangement of time-tables which is no other than an account of the method of hanging them on a board covered with little brass hooks. Then nearly every article starts with a platitude. The first starts: "Many varieties of card-charging systems are in existence, the application of which varies in different localities"; another begins: "In these days of the economy mania, anything that tends to lower the expenses in any way whatsoever . . . is considered good"; then we have the following pretty preamble: "The subject of book-labelling may appear uninteresting and too elementary even for the novice, but enthusiasm, plus application, even in minor details, means real success to every assistant. 'A little thing is a little thing, but faithfulness, etc.'"; then: "Advertising is the prime factor of modern commercial life"; then: "We are continually notified, by means of the professional and other papers, of the establishment of public libraries in various municipalities"; and, not to continue this subject too far, we have: "The popularity and usefulness of a public library depends, to a great extent, upon the methods adopted for bringing into prominence its contents." All this is profoundly true and probably sadly overlooked; but a paper on a practical method is not the place for truisms, or ethics however profound, and our advice to writers of future articles is, Don't be talky-talky, get to the business in hand; brevity is not so imposing, it is much more effective. We advise the aspiring writer on librarianship to buy this book and reduce it on the method we have proposed; it will be a useful study in what to avoid in technical writing. These, it may be contended, are matters of style, and a book of this character should not be judged altogether by literary standards. Granted; but what do we find on the side of knowledge here? We are afraid the same crudity of ideas. Page after page is turned over with the reflection that Mr. Brown said the same thing somewhat better in his *Manual*, and there is hardly a page that is not a weak reflection of some abler writer. We say "hardly" advisedly, for some of the writers handle their subjects with distinction; there is, for example, a certain freshness about the articles signed by Arthur J. Hawkes, although his matter lacks originality; still, when he has overcome a tendency to the grandiose—a fault of most young writers—he should write matter of moment; James Ross has a pleasing manner, but should conquer his inclination to quote Latin; the truth enshrined in the lines on page 22 has been just as well expressed in English. Of course a catalogue, or index, if Mr. Ross prefers it, is a powerful help to us. J. D. Young is generally worth reading, as is T. E. Turnbull, and H. T. Coutts can speak from sound experience upon binding. G. A. Stephen's list of one hundred book-collectors is a very interesting contribution, but is hardly library economics, and we are at a loss to know why the list is limited to one hundred. The list of terms contributed by Messrs. McGill and Phillips is the genesis of an admirable idea, which we hope will be expanded; as it is, it is extremely useful. These are the prominent excellences of the volume, which we have dealt with at length because it is the first volume to be published in this country by junior librarians, other than

the volumes of *The Library Assistant*, which we may be forgiven for saying are on a plane altogether different from and higher than the articles in this volume. The moral is plain. Few have the gift of finding new subjects to write about, and fewer can handle old topics with any freshness or in such a way as to give rise to new points of view. And all writing that does not accomplish one or other of these ends is vanity in the writer and weariness to the reader. There is a well-defined difference between an examination essay and an original paper; the former is to prove the writer's knowledge, the latter is to extend the knowledge of other people. Had the authors of this book realised these facts, we doubt whether it would have appeared. The essential in technical writing is to have something to say, something that has not been said over and over again; and the best advice to these aspirants is that of Carlyle to the would-be writer: "Read, man, read," and if the reading is of library literature it will prevent this continual plagairism. The library assistant has many means of being articulate to-day, and although we believe the total result of his articulation is good, he has yet much to learn; and in the profession this, as far as writing is concerned, does not apply to junior librarians alone. We trust that our remarks will not be thought unkind by the authors of "Library Economics"; those who aspire to print invite the criticism of readers, and we desire to see a much-improved "Second Series" following this volume. At any rate the writers have shown greater enthusiasm, if not greater wisdom, than their fellows.

## CORRESPONDENCE.

### A CHALLENGE!

To the Editor of "The Library Assistant."

Sir,—We have in Lewisham a Tennis Club composed of members of the Libraries Staff only. I should be glad to arrange tournaments with any other Libraries staffs who play. Challengers should address the undersigned at Brockley Library, Lewisham, S.E.

P. E. Farrow,
Honorary Secretary, Lewisham Libraries Athletic Club.

### A Useful Book.

To the Editor of "The Library Assistant."

Dear Sir,—I beg to inform you that copies of the valuable book on "Hungary of To-Day," written by Hungarian Statesmen, and edited by Percy Alden, Esq., M.P., can be obtained **gratis and post free** for use in Public Libraries, if requests for them be addressed by Librarians to E. Golonya, Esq., Editor of "Hungary," VIII. Csepreghy ut 2, Budapest, Hungary. Postage to Hungary—Cards 1d.; letters 2½d.

Yours very truly,
W. H. Shrubsole.

173, Brownhill Road,
Catford, London, S.E.

### NOTICE.

The August and September numbers of *The Library Assistant* will be combined, and published on 1st September. We regret that we have to hold over much matter, including an interesting report of the Inaugural Meeting of the Yorkshire Branch.

With this number the President relinquishes the pleasant and interesting work of editing the journal into the capable hands of Mr. H. Rutherford Purnell, and trusts that the invariable courtesy received by himself from members will be extended to the new Editor.